



Back to primary school guide for parents and carers

What will my child's school be like when they go back?

Barnsley schools, Barnsley Council and Public Health have worked together through the Barnsley Alliance to plan for all children returning to school in September.

There will be some changes to schools when your child goes back and these changes will vary from school to school, but this is to ensure your child, their friends, other students and school staff are all safe.

Schools will be following government guidance and working with public health. Your child's school will keep you informed of these changes through their website and newsletters.

Understandably, your child might be anxious about returning to school

Sometimes children find it hard to explain to us how they feel through the use of language and you may notice changes in their behaviour. As parents you know what is normal for your child and are best placed to notice any changes in behaviour and help your child work through these worries.

You may notice that your child:

- appears anxious or distressed;
- has trouble with sleeping and eating;
- appears to be in a low in mood, withdrawn or tearful;
- talks about feeling worried or is negative about themselves or their future; and for younger children, there may be more bed wetting.

Ideas on how to manage your child's return to school

As a parent you can influence the way that your child manages any worries they may have. Children often take their emotional cues from the key adults in their lives – including parents and teachers. It is important that you manage your own emotions well: remain calm, listen to any concerns, talk to them about how they feel and provide reassurance that it is ok to feel worried and that their friends will feel the same. Explain that things are different but the staff in school and their friends will be there to support them. Talk positively about school and ask them about what they enjoy most about school.



Name that emotion

This can be a confusing and overwhelming time, especially for younger children, and they may have trouble understanding their feelings. You could try making some emoji cards or painted pebbles together, showing different emotions, such as happy, sad, confused, worried, curious, tired and so on. 'Labelling' feelings may make it easier for you and your child to talk about any worries and help you support them.

Talk about it

Set aside time during the day to discuss feelings and worries. Let your child know it is ok to feel this way and that there are no 'bad' or 'good' feelings. It, it's helpful to gently explore feeling, asking "What makes you think that might happen?", "How can we prepare you if it does?"

Express feelings

Encourage your child to be open and honest with how they are feeling and allow them to feel their feelings. You can help your child to notice and to regulate their emotions by 'wondering aloud', for example, "I've noticed you are finding this difficult; I wonder if you are feeling worried today about..."

Routine

Returning to a daily routine, with regular times for meals, getting up and going to bed will be helpful – it provides a return to a structure ahead of school starting. If possible, aim to build in exercise by going out in the fresh air in a green space or nature each day. Limit lie-ins to the weekends.

Talk about the positives

Remind children about the positives – that they will be able to see their friends and teachers, remind your children how happy their friends and teachers will be to see them. Be positive about the opportunity for your child to learn new things.



Provide reassurance

Reassure children about safety measures in place to keep everybody healthy and remind children that they can also help prevent germs spreading by washing their hands with soap and coughing or sneezing into their elbow.

Share your coping strategies

Talk about the things you can do when feeling stressed such as reconnecting with friends before returning, doing regular exercise or using breathing techniques.

Make time for family fun

Young children want your time more than anything else the more time you can spend enjoying play, allows for opportunities, to express and manage feelings in a safe way and if they see you having fun, they will feel there is less to worry about.

[Visit the Young Minds website](#) for helpful hints and tips on how you can help you child manage their anxiety.

Your own mental health

It's not just been a tough time for kids – parents and carers have been under immense strain over the past few months. Make sure you look after your own mental health and contact your GP or visit the NHS website (www.nhs.uk) if you need support.

Seek support if you need it

Transitioning back to school after being in lockdown is no easy task. You may find that your child struggles to get back into school or experiences difficulties while they're at school, including displaying challenging behaviours. If this is the case, reach out to your child's school as soon as you can so that you can make them aware of the challenges and work together to support your child. If you are concerned about your child's mental health and you think they need professional support, speak to the school and your GP about the best next step.



Considering home schooling?

What will my child's school be like when they go back?

It's understandable that if you or your child is worried about returning to school that you may have been considering home schooling.

However, please note the following:

If you choose to educate your child(ren) at home, you accept full responsibility for their education. Once your child has been removed from the admission register, they can't be re-admitted without you reapplying through school admissions. It may not be possible for your child to be placed at the school of your choice.

We recommend before making a decision on home education that you:

- consider all the issues very seriously. It's a great responsibility that requires a considerable commitment of time and energy.
- plan what you intend to do with your child before making a decision. Consider the costs involved.
- be aware that your child may well miss the social side of school, especially contact with other children and joint activities.
- are aware that no grants are available to help with home education. You will be responsible for any costs of materials, equipment, examination fees etc.

Our Parental Guidance for Elective Home Education (EHE) document gives more information.

Our Education Welfare Service is always on hand to give you advice and support.

They can be contacted by our Families Information Service on 0800 0345 340.